



The C. R. Patterson and Sons Company: Black Pioneers in the Vehicle Building Industry, 1865- 1939

Christopher Nelson

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A History of the First Black Automobile Manufacturers

The C. R. Patterson and Sons Company conducted business in Greenfield, Ohio, from 1865-1939. Founded by slave-born Charles Richard Patterson, this company passed through three generations of the Patterson family. Throughout its history the company transitioned from building carriages, automobiles, trucks, and then buses, all in order to keep up with the rapidly changing demands and technology of the transportation industry. When C. R.'s son, Frederick, began producing automobiles in 1915, he became the first and only black ever known to have built an automobile. This company led many pioneering efforts in providing vehicles for both horse-drawn and motorized school transportation and was an industry leader in winter buggy design. The Pattersons tried to find their niche within the transportation industry where they could remain competitive and achieve continued success. The family was highly involved in other areas as well, including Freemasonry, politics, and aiding Booker T. Washington in the founding of the National Negro Business League.

This company and family have a unique history, and a thoroughly detailed account has never been told that fully documents their story of overcoming adversity and surviving for 74 years in the white dominated business world. This book provides as many details as possible about the Patterson family from their arrival in Greenfield in the early 1840s until 1939 when a series of multiple factors, including the Great Depression, caused the family to finally lock the factory doors and close their unique chapter in history.

This 214 page book includes 37 photographs and illustrations of the Patterson family, factory, and products. This history of the Pattersons is an adaptation of a Master's thesis and has been peer reviewed for content and accuracy. Initially written for an academic audience, the text is still readily understood by those of high school age and above. This book provides a never before seen glimpse into the lives of the Pattersons through conducting exhaustive research to discover those obscure gems of information that have remained hidden until now, yet adds so much to the overall story.

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